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Government Postpones Meeting with Opposition

11. (U) On November 19 Speaker Nino Burjanadze postponed her meeting with opposition leaders, saying the opposition was complicating the process by presenting new demands during meetings, calling for street actions, and sending different representatives to the negotiating table than had been agreed. Burjanadze objects to the inclusion of Giorgi Khaindrava, suspected by the Georgian Government of links to Russian intelligence operatives, in the negotiations. Khaindrava has not participated in any other round of talks and has not been supportive of a dialog. Burjanadze said "the meeting was postponed because the opposition has violated our agreement on a format of negotiations," accusing the opposition of unilaterally changing the format to deliberately thwart talks.

Opposition Plans Rally for November 25

12. (SBU) The nine-party United National Coalition of Opposition (UNC) announced plans for a large-scale demonstration in support of free media and Imedi TV November 125. The UNC held a joint press conference November 19 to announce the planned protests which will start at 1400 local time in Rike, the last place protesters convened after being forced from the front of parliament on November 7. The protesters were subsequently disbanded by police in Rike. Some opposition members want the demonstrators to march to Freedom Square and end in front of the parliament building. Party of the People leader Koba Davitashvili called on all Georgian citizens to "gather at Rike to show the authorities that we have not given up our struggle." On November 20 Republican leader Davit Usupashvili told the Ambassador the rally is just a celebration of President Saakashvili's resignation and support for the reopening of Imedi television, and is not intended to be a permanent demonstration. Usupashvili said the protesters will disband at the end of the rally and no final decision was made yet on whether to walk to the parliament.

PM Lays Out Plans, Saakashvili Appeals to the Masses

13. (U) In a November 19 televised meeting with President Saakashvili, PM Lado Gurgенidze laid out his plans to create jobs, promote economic growth, and improve social programs. Gurgенidze announced the minimum pension for 890,000 pensioners will increase from 38 to 55 GEL monthly on

December 1, and will rise to 76 GEL in 2008. Teacher salaries will also increase by 40 GEL. In the meeting Gurgenidze stressed the importance of Georgia staying the economic course.

¶4. (U) In Saakashvili's latest public addresses, his tone has been more conciliatory, calling for dialogue and reaching out to the older populations, the poor and academics. In his talk with Gurgenidze, he said a "permanent dialogue" with society is needed to explain the country's economic success in an "understandable language" for each citizen. He said he would carry out a dialogue with everyone so the majority of the population "understands ongoing processes very well." In a separate speech at the National Museum of Georgia, Saakashvili promised to triple funds allocated to the "important task of developing and preserving Georgia's cultural heritage" to 18 million GEL.

Natelashvili Announces His Candidacy in Press Conference

¶5. (U) On November 19, in his first press conference since the November 7 protest, Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili, who left the UNC when its members nominated Levan Gachechiladze as its presidential candidate, announced his intention to run for president. During his speech, Natelashvili still courted UNC members, inviting them to "join a coalition government of national unity."

TEFFT